



COUNTERPLANS IN POLICY DEBATE

National Federation of State
High School Associations



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An introduction to counterplans on the Education
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WHAT IS A COUNTERPLAN?

- A counterplan is a policy defended by the negative team which competes with the affirmative plan and is, on balance, more beneficial than the affirmative plan.





RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COUNTERPLAN

Specificity: The counterplan text must be explicit

Nontopicality: Some theorists say the counterplan must represent the NON-resolution

Competitiveness: The counterplan must give the judge a reason to choose between the plan and counterplan.





COUNTERPLAN SPECIFICITY

Sample Counterplan Text:

- Example 1: The fifty U.S. state governments will adopt legislation requiring the equalization of education funding between rich and poor school districts. The counterplan bans the federal government from regulating the state-level funding of elementary and secondary schools.
 - Example 2: The U.S. federal government will establish a guaranteed annual income for all persons living in poverty in the United States.
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COUNTERPLAN NONTOPICALITY

Though some judges will continue to think this is important, many contemporary debate theorists say it is NOT, for the following reasons:

- 1. The affirmative team is asking for adoption of the PLAN not the resolution.**
 - 2. Competitiveness provides adequate protection against abuse.**
 - 3. Ground is preserved, since the affirmative team had free opportunity to choose its position first from anywhere within the resolution.**
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COUNTERPLAN COMPETITIVENESS

Mutual Exclusivity: It is logically impossible to do both the plan and counterplan.

Net Benefits: The plan alone is more beneficial than the plan plus the counterplan

Other (suboptimal) Possibilities: Resource competition, Philosophical differences





MUTUAL EXCLUSIVITY

It is logically impossible to adopt both the plan and the counterplan.

Example: In the case of Counterplan Example 1: The affirmative has the federal government mandate equalization of educational funding at the state level by overturning the Supreme Court decision in *Rodriguez v San Antonio Independent School District*. The counterplan bans federal intervention and has the states equalize funding.

Problems with Mutual Exclusivity: Often the competitiveness based on mutual exclusivity is artificial because the text of the counterplan simply bans the plan. That is the case in the “Example 1” counterplan proposing state funding equalization. There is a provision of the counterplan banning federal intervention in funding, but it would certainly be logically possible to enact BOTH federal and state mandates on the equalization of funding. The provision in the plan “banning” federal action is artificial – it has been placed in the counterplan simply for the purpose of claiming mutual exclusivity. This provision is not an essential part of the counterplan.





NET BENEFITS

Shows why it would be undesirable to combine the plan and counterplan; as a practical matter, there is some disadvantage to the plan which the counterplan does not link to.

In the guaranteed annual income example, the negative team is claiming that that true cause of educational gaps between socio-economic groups is poverty itself. While it would be possible to do both a guaranteed annual income and school choice vouchers, the counterplan alone will solve the harm while avoiding the disadvantages: destruction of public education and federalism (based on the argument that education ought to be the exclusive function of state governments).





PERMUTATIONS

A permutation is an argument offered by the affirmative to demonstrate the non-competitiveness of a counterplan; it suggests a specific way that the plan and counterplan can be desirably combined in order to avoid the negative disadvantage.

Example: Suppose an affirmative case proposes school choice vouchers. The negative offers the state counterplan (Example #1 above). The affirmative suggests the following permutation: The federal government will negotiate agreements with state governments allowing them to choose the mechanism to be used in equalizing funding. This avoids the “federalism” disadvantage because it preserves state power.

